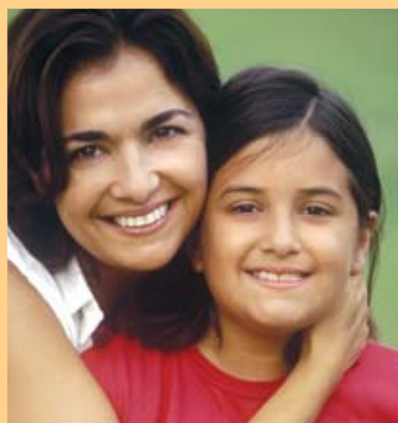


# Louisville's International Population is Growing:

## *A World of Opportunities and Challenges*



**Louisville is changing dramatically.** Over the past decade, the community has attracted thousands of immigrants who are younger, better educated and more diverse than the nation's foreign-born population as a whole – a trend that can greatly benefit the region's economic development efforts.

To capitalize on that trend, the community must continue to welcome immigrants, support efforts to attract highly skilled foreign workers and expand adult education opportunities.

Those are some of the findings of a study of the metropolitan area's foreign-born population. The study was conducted by the Urban Institute, a nonpartisan economic and social policy research institution based in Washington, D.C.

The Louisville Metro Office for International Affairs (OIA) commissioned the study to help local officials better understand the needs of the region's immigrant population and its impact on the local economy. The OIA supports and promotes the successful integration of immigrants into the community through awareness, advocacy and referral.





## HIGHLIGHTS OF THE FINDINGS

The labor migration story in Louisville is complex. Like other communities, Louisville has experienced a large influx of Latin American immigrants who are engaged in low-skilled jobs in various industries. In addition, however, Louisville has received as many – or

more – highly educated immigrants from diverse origins. These immigrants have contributed greatly to Louisville's growth in higher-skilled sectors of the economy.

The Urban Institute study showed that:

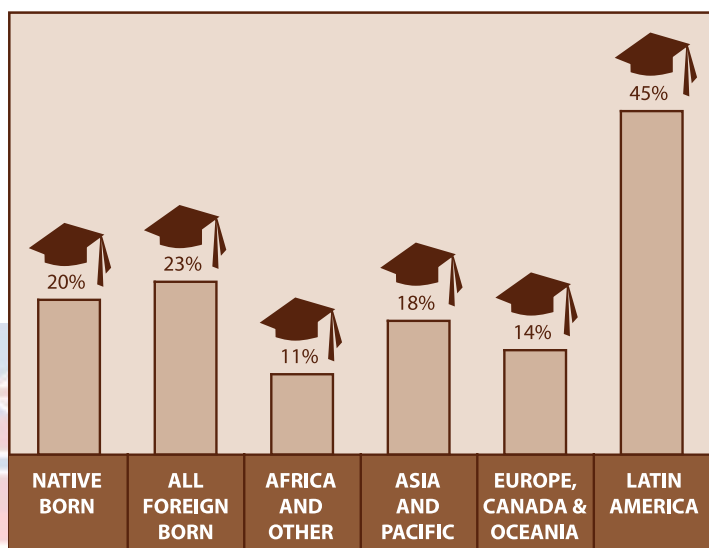
**Louisville's immigrant population growth is much faster than the nation's.** Although the foreign-born share of Louisville's population (4.5 percent) is well below the national average (12 percent), the metropolitan area's immigrant population is growing rapidly. Between 2000 and 2004, Louisville's foreign-born population grew by 93 percent, compared to 10 percent nationally. The 23-county metropolitan labor market is now home to about 53,000 immigrants.

**Louisville has a lower share of immigrants who are undocumented (18 percent) than the U.S. (27 percent) and most other Southeastern communities.**

The undocumented share in many Southeastern cities exceeded 30 percent—for example, 32 percent of Nashville's immigrants are undocumented.

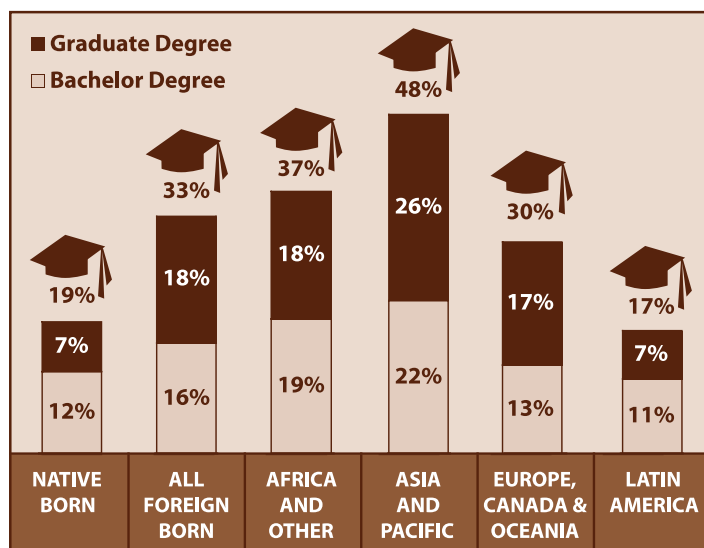
**Most of Louisville's immigrant groups are highly educated.** Louisville immigrants are more likely than their national counterparts to have a high school diploma (77 percent vs. 62 percent) or a four-year college degree (33 percent vs. 24 percent). Foreign-born adults age 25 and over are also considerably more likely to have a four-year college degree than the metro area's native-born residents (33 percent vs. 19 percent).

### Share with Less than a High School Degree, Louisville Adults Ages 25 and over, by Place of Birth, 2000



SOURCE: Urban Institute analysis of U.S. Census, 2000.

### Share with 4-Year College Degree, Louisville Adults Ages 25 and over, by Place of Birth, 2000



NOTES: Numbers might not add up because of rounding.  
SOURCE: Urban Institute analysis of U.S. Census, 2000.

**Louisville's immigrants have more diverse origins than immigrants nationally.** Latin America accounts for just 38 percent of Louisville's immigrants, compared to 55 percent nationally. By contrast, Louisville has a higher share than the national average of immigrants from Africa (15 percent vs. 2 percent) and Asia and the Pacific (35 percent vs. 26 percent).

**Louisville has a high share of refugees, due to its large federal refugee resettlement program.** Approximately 15 percent of Louisville's immigrants are refugees (individuals granted legal status due to persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution in their home countries). That is twice the national share of 7 percent.

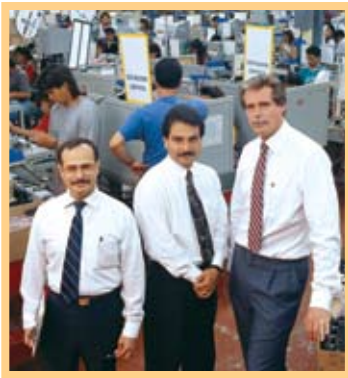
**Educational attainment and income vary widely across the different immigrant groups.** The fastest-growing immigrant group, Latin Americans, have the lowest educational attainment. Latin Americans, along with Africans, are also the poorest immigrants, while the median income for Asian and European immigrants exceeds that for native-born Louisville residents.

## OPPORTUNITIES

Two major obstacles to Louisville's economic development in recent years have been the region's slow population growth and low educational attainment level compared to competitor cities. Another perceived shortcoming has been the community's lack of diversity. The recent influx of highly educated immigrants from all over the world represents an opportunity to overcome these obstacles, while also providing a much-needed workforce supply.

The Urban Institute study showed that:

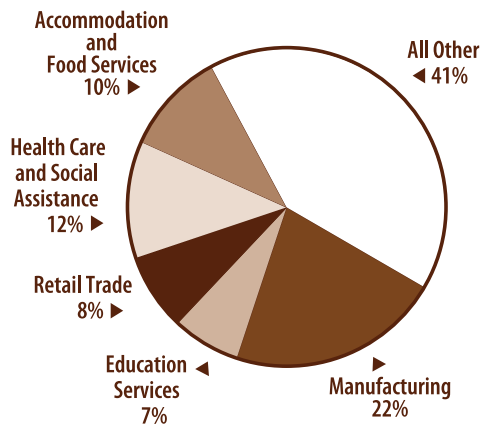
**Immigrants are key to the region's future workforce growth.** New immigrants are mostly in their younger working years and come to the United States for better jobs. Louisville's economy will become increasingly dependent on foreign-born labor as the population ages and baby boomers in the current workforce retire.



Immigrants are already a critical component of the region's lower-skilled labor force. The number of native-born workers without a high school degree shrank by almost 20 percent during the 1990s. As the number of less-educated native-born workers falls even further, immigrants will increasingly meet the demand for low-

skilled labor in sectors such as construction, manufacturing, retail trade, accommodation and food services.

### Major Industries of Immigrant Employment



SOURCE: Urban Institute analysis of U.S. Census, 2000.

### The best-educated workers earn the highest wages, regardless of whether or not they are immigrants.

The relatively high educational attainment of many immigrant groups is reflected in their high income and earnings. In 1999 immigrants with four-year college degrees earned more than twice as much as high school dropouts (\$19 versus \$8 per hour), and immigrants earned about the same as natives with equivalent levels of education.

**The region's employers and higher education institutions attract highly skilled immigrants.** The region's universities attract substantial numbers of international students and scholars, and industries such as health care, education, professional services, and the sciences employ growing numbers of highly skilled immigrants.

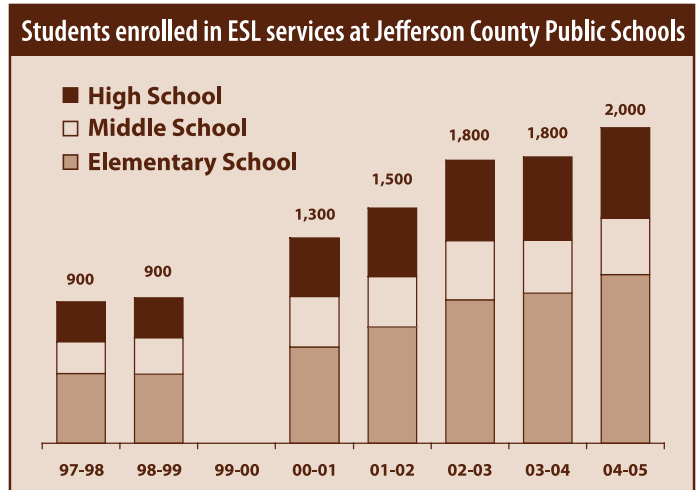
### CHALLENGES

Louisville's rapidly growing and increasingly diverse immigrant population presents a number of challenges to the area's local governments, as well as public and private institutions.

Among those:

Rapid immigration has more than doubled the number of students enrolled in English as a second language (ESL) programs. Over the past seven years, the number of ESL students in the Jefferson County Public Schools grew by 122 percent: from 900 to 2,000.

### English as a Second Language Children in Jefferson County Public Schools



NOTES: Enrollment totals are rounded to the nearest 100 students. Students who waived the ESL services are excluded from the totals. Data is unavailable for 1999-2000.

SOURCE: Jefferson County Public Schools Data Books, 1997-2005.

**Public schools must be prepared to educate students from diverse cultural backgrounds who speak a wide variety of languages.** In fact, at least 77 languages were spoken in the homes of Louisville's residents in 2000.

**Other institutions face a growing need for interpreter services.** Employers, job-training centers, hospitals and social service providers are among the many public and private institutions that must grapple with how to serve a diverse and fast-changing population.

### Top 10 Languages Spoken by Louisville's LEP Immigrants, Ages 5 and Over

Language	Number of LEP Immigrants	Percentage of All LEP Immigrants
Spanish	6,000	40%
Korean	1,200	9%
Vietnamese	1,200	8%
Chinese	900	6%
Arabic	700	5%
Russian	600	4%
Tagalog	500	3%
Serbo-Croatian	500	3%
German	400	3%
French	300	2%

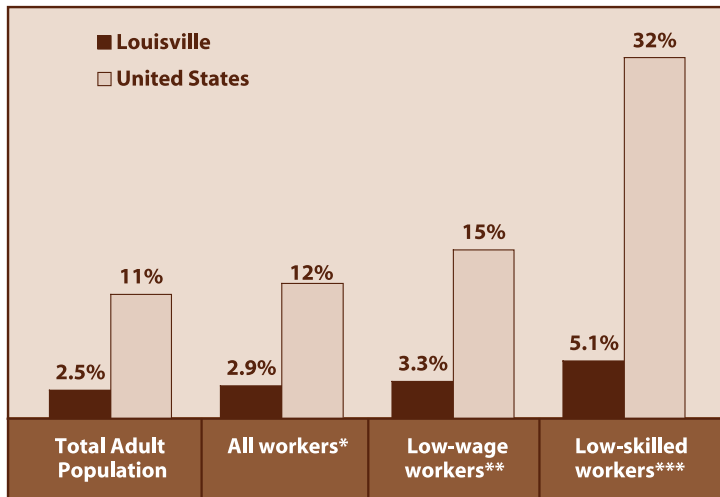
SOURCE: Urban Institute analysis of U.S. Census, 2000.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Urban Institute study made a number of recommendations to help ensure that Louisville's immigrants integrate successfully into the region's economy, social fabric and political community:

**Continue to welcome immigrants to Louisville to support the region's future workforce growth.** Immigrants are an important source of workers for both low-skilled and higher-skilled jobs.

### Immigrant Share of Adult Population and Workforce



NOTES:

\* Workers are 18 to 64 years old, employed and earning non-zero wages.

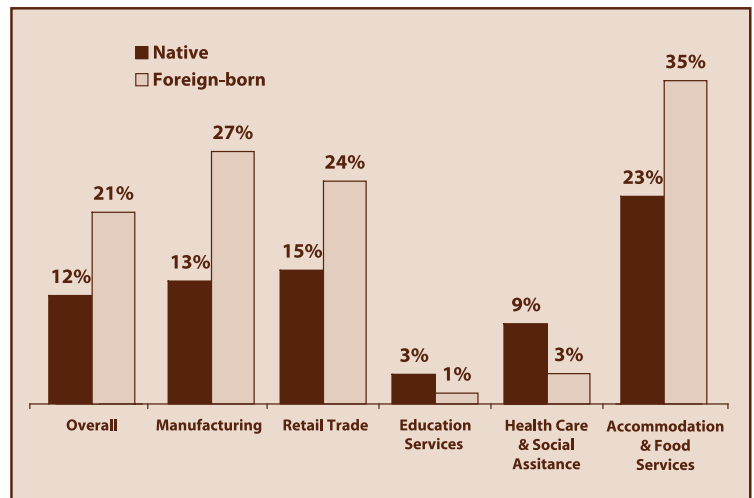
\*\* Low-wage workers earned less than twice the minimum wage in 1999.

\*\*\* Low-skilled workers have less than a high school education.

**Support efforts by the region's employers and higher education institutions to attract highly skilled immigrants.** Louisville's public and private sector leaders should consider the important roles that highly educated immigrants could play—for instance in filling shortages in health care occupations—as they chart the region's economic future.

**Expand adult education services.** Louisville should invest in education and training programs tailored toward Latin American and other low-income immigrants in order to raise their productivity. Improving immigrants' productivity and wages would also lower their poverty and demand for public benefits and social services.

## Share without a High School Degree, Louisville Workers Ages 18-64, by Nativity and Selected Industries, 1999



SOURCE: Urban Institute analysis of U.S. Census, 2000.

**Expand ESL classes to immigrant adults.** Classes might be tailored to groups of immigrants with different needs – for example, workers in specific industries, such as health care or hospitality.

**Help immigrants transfer education credentials from their home countries.** Many well-educated immigrants must work in occupations that are not their areas of expertise because U.S. employers do not accept degrees or certificates earned in foreign countries. Efforts to transfer credentials or get immigrants re-certified are especially important in the education, health care and social service industries, where the demand for workers is expected to increase rapidly.

**Provide translation and interpretation for critical public services.** Public institutions such as hospitals, the department of motor vehicles and social service providers should offer translation and interpretation services to help ensure the access of Louisville's immigrants to services when they need them, and to help improve the overall health, public safety and well-being of Louisville's residents.

**Build on the successes of Louisville's refugee resettlement program.** Louisville's success in resettling refugees, especially with regard to employment, may provide lessons for the broader integration of immigrants and limited English speakers.

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**Focus on educating immigrants' children in the public schools to ensure that they learn English.** The rapid increase in the number of children of immigrants in Louisville raises significant challenges for the public school system. Investment in the education of immigrants' children, however, will yield large returns when these children become skilled workers in Louisville's future labor force.

**Increase immigrants' access to health insurance and health care.** Immigrants and their children are more likely to be uninsured than natives. In addition, immigrants face other barriers to health care, such as language, cultural differences and fears about approaching health care providers. Louisville can improve immigrants' access to health care through the Louisville Metro Center for Health Equity and similar local efforts.

**Plan comprehensive services to facilitate immigrants' integration into the community.** Louisville should develop the means to reach newcomer populations to provide services more efficiently and implement new programs. The city should seek creative ways to disseminate information and integrate programs for immigrants – for instance, by building on the model of the refugee resettlement program and expanding services to other immigrants, working through the Louisville Office for International Affairs.

### **The Office for International Affairs**

The Office for International Affairs (OIA) is a unit of Louisville Metro Government. The OIA supports and promotes a vibrant, successful, interconnected, multicultural community through awareness, advocacy and referral. Its goals include:

- Raising awareness of the international community and the issues facing immigrants.
- Enhancing opportunities for the international community by reducing barriers to success.
- Promoting the value of education through collaborative efforts to enhance the quality of life for all members of the community.
- Supporting and advocating for the delivery of social services to the international community.
- Helping the international community achieve and maintain a greater level of financial well-being.

*The 1990 and 2000 estimates in this report are based on U.S. Census data. Local officials, advocates and community leaders in Louisville have estimated that the 2000 Census may have undercounted immigrants from some regions – particularly Latin America – by as much as two or three times.*

For a copy of the Urban Institute report  
“A Profile of the Foreign-Born in the Louisville Metropolitan Area,”  
go to [www.louisvilleky.gov/international](http://www.louisvilleky.gov/international)

*Raising awareness  
of the international  
community...*



**Jerry E. Abramson, Mayor  
Louisville Metro Council**

## **Acknowledgements**

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